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Female Empowerment in Feminist Dystopias and Young Adults' Literature : Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Suzanne Collins' The Hunger Games and Naomi Alderman's The Power

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***Female Empowerment in Feminist Dystopias and Young Adults' Literature :
Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*
and Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, de LEIRE MARTÍN ANTÓN***

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TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

Título

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ABSTRACT:

For many years dystopian works have been mainly written by men; those by female authors were few and not recognised as deserved. In the 1970s, the second-wave of feminism was growing and it was then when the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood started to support feminist values and to fight for women's rights. In 1985 *The Handmaid's Tale* was published: a feminist dystopia written as never before, creating a fictional world in which female oppression is criticised. In the 21st century, Atwood receives the recognition her novel deserved, and it starts to be one of the main influences for new female authors of young adults' literature. Thus, Suzanne Collins and Naomi Alderman have created in their works empowered female characters whose supremacy is superior than the male's. It could even be said that the future of science-fiction is female.

KEY WORDS: dystopia, feminism, Atwood, female oppression, young adults' literature, power (empowerment), science fiction

RESUMEN:

Durante muchos años las distopías han sido algo meramente propio de escritores hombres, aquellas escritas por mujeres eran pocas y no reconocidas como se merecían. Cuando en los años 70 la segunda oleada del movimiento feminista crecía, la canadiense Margaret Atwood comenzaba a posicionarse en los ideales de esta, luchando por los derechos de las mujeres. Fue entonces cuando en 1985 aparece *The Handmaid's Tale*, una distopía feminista nunca antes vista que, creando un mundo ficticio, critica la opresión hacia las mujeres. Una vez llegados al siglo XXI, la obra de Atwood recibe el éxito que merecía y comienza a influenciar a nuevas autoras de literatura juvenil. Así, Suzanne Collins y Naomi Alderman han creado en sus obras personajes femeninos empoderados con una supremacía superior a la masculina. La ciencia ficción, puede decirse, tiene un futuro feminista.

PALABRAS CLAVE: distopía, feminismo, Atwood, opresión a las mujeres, literatura juvenil, poder (empoderación), ciencia ficción

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction, objectives, and methodology:.....	5
2. Feminist affinities to Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> : Identity, sexuality, motherhood and female power	9
3. Female empowerment in Literature for Young Adults	19
3.1. Suzanne Collins's <i>The Hunger Games</i>	21
3.2. Naomi Alderman's <i>The Power</i>	26
4. Conclusion	31
5. Bibliography	33

1. Introduction, objectives, and methodology:

The role of women in literature is undeniable, especially in contemporary literature. In the 1970s, the feminist movement had a remarkable effect on American society. Contemporary female characters nowadays try to accomplish feminist values, by being empowered women in search for equality in a world which is still dominated by men. Literature is the only means which has the privilege to redefine the real role of women.

It is a fact that, reviewing dystopias from the last century, not many female authors are renowned. In “In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction”, Sarah Lefanu believes that the dystopian genre is characterised by “a cultural and political male hegemony” (187). When a woman wrote a dystopia, it was not taken as serious as a man’s work, but it was considered “satirical” (31). Back in time, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley published in 1826 *The Last Man*, describing a future world infested by a plague. Moreover, Katherine Burdekin published *Swastika Night* in 1929, a dystopian world ruled by men in which women’s duty is to procreate, they are even named “unwomen”¹. Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) dealt with the notion of “feminine”, by forcing a man to go under surgery to become a woman, and thus being a man trapped in the body of a female. Carter fought against the idea of femaleness being something innate. Taking into consideration all these previous works it is easier to understand Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* as an ideological phenomenon and not something isolated.

Oppression has been the central point of feminist dystopias throughout history. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, after the proclamation of the Republic of Gilead (under religious means), women became slaves in a world ruled by men. It is interesting that, despite the fact that it was published in the 80s, I did not hear about it until a couple of years ago. I think that its success lies on the idea that, when it was written, “the Wall was still up” in Berlin and, even though it “was based on some sort of real-life event” (Dowling), it was the TV show based on the novel that helped (in a digital era) to emphasize the injustices Atwood was fighting against and we are still fighting for. For instance, the fact of making Moira black in the TV adaptation introduces racism into the plot.

Hence, it is true that literature changes with time. Since in some occasions it is used as a social weapon, young adults are the future and should be the ones absorbing

¹ This notion will appear in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* years later.

these values to make a future change (for which adults can do little). For this reason, young adults' literature is very much concerned with feminism and has started to portray female empowerment by giving women the power. Among a great variety of this kind of novels, I have chosen to analyse, alongside Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) and Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016). The three novels have as common feature the fact that their main characters are females and they all live in dystopian worlds. *The Hunger Games* is a worldwide phenomenon among adolescents and *The Power* is such a recent work, but it has the traits to become a feminist icon in a near future. All in all, they are novels which represent what Atwood was demanding in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Taking into account the aforementioned reasons, with this analysis I seek to answer several questions, all having to do with feminism in dystopias. I will start by looking at how women are oppressed in *The Handmaid's Tale* and the kind of power they possess. Then I will analyse the role of young adults' literature in feminism. To finish off I will be looking at how female empowerment is portrayed in *The Hunger Games*, specially in Katniss. Moreover, I will analyse how women use their power in *The Power*. Finally, I will conclude with a general view of what I have learnt about the importance of feminism in contemporary literature.

Therefore, the dissertation will be divided in several parts. The first one will be a theoretical approach to feminism in dystopias, followed by the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Then, the issue of feminism in young adults' literature will be looked at, analysing *The Hunger Games* and *The Power*.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that there are few sources regarding dystopian theories, so in the next lines I will try to define what dystopian literature is and its relationship with utopias and gender. Mainly I will focus on the theories of two authors: Keith Booker and Simone de Beauvoir.

As it will be highlighted during the next sections, dystopian literature is a very recent genre, therefore this could be the main reason why there are not enough theoretical sources. In utopian literature, a perfect world is created, while in dystopian literature it is the complete opposite – in it the ideal world created goes wrong (Beulen 8). Keith Booker in his work *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (1994) defends what has been mentioned about the lack of enough sources. Booker and other contemporary critics claim that the First World War brought as a consequence the dystopian genre (Beulen 8).

The Enlightenment and the scientific progress finished off the ideas of utopias, and dystopian reactions appeared. The human race ended up displaced due to its lack of capacity, and the portrayal of the world started to be negative (Booker 5, 107; qtd. in Beulen 8).

As we will discuss in the following sections with *The Handmaid's Tale*, nowadays neither the success of the dystopian genre nor its accurate definition is clear enough. Booker in his work defines the dystopian literature as “that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. [...] [D]ystopian literature generally also constitutes of a critique of existing social conditions or political systems” (3). Furthermore, dystopia has also been described by authors such as Sharon Wilson as “a nightmare” (Wilson 1) which involves gender issues criticizing different roles and traditions. Through Booker and Wilson’s approaches it is clear that one of the main reasons why the dystopian genre is used is to provide criticism of society.

In addition, due to the fact that my work will be focused on the portrayal of female characters and female empowerment, it is important to provide some kind of theory on gender that will help to separate “ambiguous” notions as gender and sex. As Wilson states: dystopian literature is usually combined with gender so it can create a social critique by (most of the times) challenging roles. (Wilson 1)

Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1949) defends that gender is constructed while sex is something already set (qtd. in Beulen 11). Thus, “sex is a biological fact”, but gender is a cultural fact (Butler; qtd. in Beulen 11). Many authors argue De Beauvoir’s idea, but in my dissertation I will apply her belief of gender and sex being different concepts, based on the fact that all the characters I will be dealing with are female but challenge gender roles by having masculine characteristics.

To conclude, my analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Power* will be based on Booker’s explanations of dystopian literature and De Beauvoir’s idea of gender.

2. Feminist affinities to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Identity, sexuality, motherhood and female power

In order to understand Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* it is important to take into consideration her condition as Canadian and woman at the same time. Canada has been a nation oppressed by other countries such as the United States or Great Britain. Canada, broadly speaking, has been marginalised and Atwood, in her works, is always very sensitive towards discriminated against groups. Canadian people usually feel a lack of identity, and they have to ask themselves questions such "who am I?" or "where is here?". Considering this idea, it seems important to mention Atwood's analysis of Canadian literature in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). As it is stated in the Archives of the *New York Times* by Jay Walz, in *Survival* "Miss Atwood complained that Canadian heroes and heroines had too often been made to succumb to the environment, instead of having it stimulate them to great accomplishment".

Hence, Atwood relates the Canadian situation with the women's situation. Atwood was probably a feminist writer without being aware of it, since she started writing about female issues before it was a formal movement. Women, as Canadian people, have been oppressed for a long time. Thus, Atwood considers her roots and her female gender essential in her writing:

The themes of women's search for recognition amidst a dominant culture that erases and devalues female experience, and Canada's search for a national identity amidst the dominant cultures of Great Britain and the United States intertwine and permeate Atwood's critical and creative writing [...] Atwood developed as a writer during the same time a growing cultural nationalism developed in Canada and the Women's Movement expanded in North America" (Weaver 53)

The following section will study Margaret Atwood's use of a dystopian society in *The Handmaid's Tale* to portray female power and, moreover, I will examine particular aspects of the novel such as feminism, motherhood, sexuality, or identity, among others. As mentioned in the previous section, we can say that, in general terms, dystopian literature is that genre which provides criticism of a society through the creation of a fictional new society, with special emphasis on its negative features. In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood focuses her novel on the role of women. By

expressing the situation of women oppressed by the government, Atwood is at the same time reflecting on the female role in the real world, which in many cases is also oppressed and treated as minor. This section will mainly focus on the main character, Offred, but some other characters will also be taken into consideration.

Contextualising *The Handmaid's Tale*, we can say that it is set in a near future in which the United States of America is ruled by the Republic of Gilead, where most women have become infertile. It grabbed my attention that it seems that they have assumed that women have the reproductive problem, not men: "there is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood 79). The truth is that men are also sterile, but they have preferred to blame their women.

Based on a patriarchal government, the population is divided depending on sex and not gender². As Beulen explains (13-4), both men and women are split, but men do not suffer the consequences; women, on the other hand, are classified depending on their ability to reproduce. Women are divided into Wives, Marthas, Handmaids, Aunts, Jezebels, Econowives, and Unwomen. The Wives are the Commander's partners, and Marthas are the official housekeepers. Handmaids, like the main character, are assigned to a house to provide the family with a baby. Besides, the Aunts' duty is to train the Handmaids, whilst Jezebels are prostitutes, Econowives fulfil wives' duties, and the Unwomen cannot carry out any of these "tasks" and therefore are sent to the Colonies, which seem to be like a Nazi camp. Hence, the Unwomen do not have much life expectancy and they suffer the worst destination. Even though these women develop different purposes, in the end they are all suffering from the oppression of a male government, which controls all their actions.

It is important to explain the Commanders' role in Gilead. In the words of Vanessa Obarauner in "Gender in utopian and Dystopian Fiction", the Commanders

are not only the ones who make all the decisions within the society, but are also the only male caste who is allowed to live in a household with a Wife, Marthas, housekeepers, Guardians for protection and a Handmaid, in case the Wife is unable to bear children. (34-35).

² I will expand on this issue later.

In this case, Offred's Commander is Fred. Oberaunner explains the fact that there are more male groups, such as the Eyes, whose duty is "to surveil and control the inhabitants" (35). Another group is the Angels, who do not appear in the novel but we are told about them. Finally, the Guardians of Faith are considered "a lower class of soldiers" (Oberauner 35).

The Aunts' role should also be highlighted in terms of their representation of the government's ideas through women. The main purpose of the Aunts is to brainwash women who are about to become Handmaids. By enforcing the government's rules, they try to make Handmaids think the way they want. For instance, at the Red Centre when Janine testifies to being "gang-raped at 14 and had an abortion" (Atwood 111), Aunt Helena replies

But whose fault was it? [...] holding up one plump finger. Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison. Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams pleased with us. She did. She did. She did. Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. Teach her a lesson. (111-112)

They show the Handmaids how they are going to be treated – as objects whose only function is to have babies. They use pornography as a means to show women under the control of men which, in my opinion, shows Atwood's criticism towards the pornography industry, basically designed for a target audience conformed by men. Although they use more films, they all share the fact that women are being abused: "Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces" (128). The language the Aunts use seems a bit cliché in the use of orders and constant warnings, among others. They could even be considered robots.

Brainwashing is commonly used in dystopian novels; it usually consists of a doctrine formed by a group of people with specific thoughts. Therefore, they violate their human rights and condition their future decisions. This idea is discussed by Michaela Hintringer as follows:

Dystopian governments often take the liberty of intruding into the most private aspects of its citizens' lives, thus creating the impression of having to be on alert constantly. It is this inability to go about privacy that constitutes the real notion of terror here - the feeling of never being able to escape, the all-consuming helplessness that intrudes is what eventually breaks the mind of the majority of dystopian citizens. (12)

The few fertile and single women are sent to the Women's Centre, where they are trained to be Handmaids. Although this society is a dystopian one, I think it would be right to consider Gilead's society a utopia for men and specially the government of the society. Therefore, it could be considered both a utopia and a dystopia. Hence, Oberaunes questions if Offred's attitude fits the characteristics of a dystopia:

there are critics who claim that Atwood's novel does not meet all requirements of dystopian fiction, since it includes certain utopian elements as well. [...] Offred, the main protagonist of *The Handmaid's Tale*, may be the victim of this totalitarian society, however, she still possesses a certain amount of hope, which stands contrary to a dystopian outlook. (33)

In a first reading it is easy to find in the novel the male superiority over women, but if one looks closer there is also oppression among the female characters. Firstly, as mentioned above, the Aunts work with the male government to train the Handmaids to be abused, controlling them somehow. The Wives control the Marthas and Handmaids, but there are moments in which Handmaids control Wives too. Offred controls Serena in terms of maternity, since she is the one carrying the baby and controlling it, although the baby was created against her will.³

The close relationship Offred has with the Commander allows her to have power over his wife Serena Joy: "she was taking something away from her, although she didn't know it" (208). In fact, Serena Joy was a singer before Gilead was proclaimed, but now she has lost all her power and she is dominated by men, her only duties remaining in the household. Serena seems to retake power when she offers Offred the possibility of having a sexual encounter with Nick, as a consequence of her fear of her husband's sterility.

There is another moment in which the Wife is controlling the Handmaid. When Janine is giving birth, the Wife adopts the same position and so "Janine is framed by her" (135), and the same happens during the monthly Ceremonies. Apart from the Handmaids being objectified, in this passage we also see how the baby is considered an object, a trophy. Offred refers to the baby as a "product" and, as we can see in this other moment, motherhood is taken away from the Handmaid and given to the Wife, as if it was an object: "the Commander's Wife looks down at the baby as if it's a bouquet of flowers" (136).

³ This issue will be explained later.

The characters of Ofglen and Moira are also extremely relevant when dealing with female power, especially since they symbolize female resistance. Ofglen is the one who shows Offred the necessity of resistance – she is the symbol of female power. Ofglen speaks her mind and tries not to depend on anyone. However, this can be contrasted by her suicide, is it a coward act? Or is she just forbidding any man to kill her and therefore proclaiming herself as the owner of her body? Through the character of Moira, the importance of female friendship is represented. Moira also embodies resistance and, in addition, she is a lesbian, which goes against the heterosexual relationships that Gilead values exclusively. She tries to escape in different occasions, but she ends up becoming a Jezebel.

Apart from women controlling other women, there are also passages in which the Handmaids are scorned by other women, even in funerals: “Beneath her veil the first one scowls at us. One of the others turn aside, spites on the sidewalk. The Econowives do not like us” (59). Although the Handmaids are referred to with terms such as sacred vessels or seed, among others, it does not have a positive connotation. As Offred reflects on once, they are not even whores or geishas, for they have even removed from them the sexual behaviour, in terms of passion. Wives also treat Handmaids badly, as when Janine is called by the Wife of her family as follows: “Little whores, all of them, but still, you can’t be choosy” (49). Wives’ hostile behaviour towards the Handmaids can be understood as a symptom of jealousy for different reasons. First, they are not able to have a baby themselves and, second, the Handmaids are the ones having sex with their husbands. The Handmaids have a privilege the Wives do not. It seems that they have accepted the law the government imposed on them but, at the same time, we as readers are not sure if they completely agreed about it or if there is no other choice for them. For example, maybe Serena accepts Fred and Offred’s encounters because she wants to have a child as soon as possible and then stop that relationship. However, the Wives are still women and therefore they are also being oppressed by the religious and male government.

As I mentioned at the beginning, in Gilead women are divided by sex and not by gender. According to the Monash University of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, “sex refers to biological differences; chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs”, while “gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine and feminine”⁴. The government of Gilead only has interest on

⁴ <<http://www.med.monash.edu.au/gendermed/sexandgender.html>> (Accessed on the 17th of May)

the sexual genitals as a medium to procreate. For that reason, it can be affirmed that gender has been taken away and, concurrently, identities have been too. Identity usually shapes gender; thus, the lack of one supposes the lack of the other. Offred has not lost her identity but it has been suppressed. Handmaids are supposed to have been brainwashed by the Aunts; however, Offred throughout the novel talks about her past. She is aware of the situation she is living but she has not forgotten who she is. One of the main factors of the loss of identity is the fact that her real name is unknown. Handmaids are named after the man they belong to, in an attempt to make them forget who they really are. Offred is called like that because she belongs to Fred (Of+Fred). But, as it is said in the novel, Offred does not reveal her real name but she holds on to it, and so she holds on to her identity for herself. Maybe revealing her name, even to the reader, is a way of losing her personal identity: “My name is not Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it is forbidden. I tell myself it does not matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong” (94).

Another symbol of the loss of identity is the outfit the Handmaids are forced to wear. They all wear the same red garments with white wimples. In this regard, Rebecca Cristopher defends that

None of the protagonists in *The Handmaid's Tale* ever chose to wear red; the color was given to them by Atwood, who looked to color symbolism in Renaissance art when she created her highly-codified society uniforms. According to an interview the author gave to PBS, the red habit was a natural choice for a fictional dystopian future, as it was inspired by a non-fictional dystopian past that was fixated on red.⁵

Not only that, but the wimple makes them look straight ahead, avoiding the possibility of seeing more angles, representing the lack of freedom of thought the Handmaids have. From my point of view, this clothing affects them in two completely different ways. One is by making them invisible, as I said, as a symbol of their loss of identity. Everyone wearing the same makes them have no personality and be recognised as a group and not as individual beings. On the other hand, the outfit makes them visible, but visible only as Handmaids (Beulen 16), as sexual objects that can be seen from far away due to the red colour. Moreover, the Handmaids are marked with a tattoo like cattle – another sign of

⁵ Available in <<https://www.manrepeller.com/2018/04/red-in-the-handmaids-tale-costumes.html>> (Accessed on the 17th of May)

their loss of identity (Beulen 17), the dehumanization and objectification of women in Gilead. Besides, if they are not able to have a baby, they become Unwomen and they are sent to the Colonies (Beulen 17), where they may definitely lose their identity by being killed. Offred knows her “importance” in Gilead and she believes she is a “national resource”, as we can see illustrated in a harsh reflection by Offred: “It’s supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource” (75).

Regarding female power in the novel, Offred considers at some point that “they didn’t get everything. There was something inside her they couldn’t take away. She looked invincible”.⁶ Thus, she shows her power in different ways. First, she uses her sexuality as a symbol of power. As aforementioned, Offred is in control of the process of her maternity and therefore she is the most important part in the reproduction process. Even though she is forced to start the process, she later controls it and, as a consequence, she is able to control her body. At the beginning of the novel Offred has sexual fantasies with a guard, symbolising also the control over her body, and since that moment she starts exhibiting her power over the Commander and his Wife. As Offred’s words confirm, “It’s difficult for me to believe I have power over him, of any sort, but I do” (272). As the plot develops, Offred’s secret relationship with the Commander gives her more power apart from the sexual encounters, since they play Scrabble and he offers her magazines, two forbidden practices.

One of the reasons why Offred is using her sexuality as a means to achieve power is because she knows it is the only way she can survive in Gilead. In this sense, she accepts her condition as sexual object and she behaves passively. However, although she uses her sexuality to reach her goals, she also shows sometimes that she feels uncomfortable with her own body being naked: “My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated” (82). Thus, Atwood shows a real female issue: the conflicts with sexuality. Offred in these moments is not confident and she even feels guilty, for her sexuality has driven her into that situation.

Besides, Offred also uses her sexuality with the Commander and Nick to get material and non-material things, from magazines (as mentioned above) to information. According to Ani Bundel:

⁶ Mike Barker. “Faithful”. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Season 1. Hulu. 53:22.

Nick's role is unclear from the beginning. He's the chauffeur for the Waterfords, meaning he is of the "Guardian" class [...]. When Offred fails to conceive within the first few months, Mrs. Waterford begins to plot to have the Handmaid sleep with Nick, in hopes this will solve the infertility issue. Offred suspects Nick is an Eye (one of Gilead's secret police), partially because she views him as too casual for a Guardian, and partly because Ofglen told her there was an Eye in her household.⁷

Along the same lines, *The Handmaid's Tale* also deals with the issue of motherhood (something unique in women) in different stages, not only the birthing process. The novel illustrates Offred's past relationship with her mother, who has been sent to the Colonies. At first, Offred feels relieved because she thought her mother was dead, but then she knows it is likely she will not survive in the Colonies. Furthermore, Offred has a past (which is also her present) as mother with her daughter; and to finish off we have Offred's future position as mother with her yet unborn child. The Handmaids are forced to conceive a child for another family and, regardless of being their biological mothers, they are not considered such. The Republic of Gilead sees women just as the medium to reproduce and, as in the case of Offred, Handmaids are also taken away from their previous children. Motherhood is contemplated in the novel just as a process in population growth, without taking into consideration the emotional mother-child relationship.

As it is cited from the *Genesis* at the beginning of the novel:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. (Atwood)

By this quotation Atwood is illustrating the importance fertility has in Gilead. Traditional beliefs are reinstated in Gilead, where the superiors brainwash the citizens in order to fit the words of the Bible.

⁷ Available in <<https://www.elitedaily.com/p/who-is-nick-blaine-in-the-handmaids-tale-the-waterfords-chauffeur-is-not-what-he-seems-8697777>> (Accessed on the 1st of June)

The Handmaid's Tale has achieved its popularity with its recent TV adaptation, carried out by Hulu. In a moment in which feminism is having its greatest influence on society, there is more than enough room for a story like this one. Atwood's fictional world of Gilead is not illogical at all. Hulu's series is opening young girls' mind with their portrayal of female mistreatment. Although Atwood's story has only covered the first season of the show, due to its success producers have dared to continue Offred's adventure in season two, with season three on the way.

3. Female empowerment in Literature for Young Adults

It is a fact that feminism is, nowadays, playing an important role in young adults, and therefore, in the literature targeted to them. According to Rhoda Belleza in an interview conducted by *Bustle*, a work can be considered feminist when it “honors and values a woman’s humanity and complexity” (Jarema). However, we should take into consideration what makes a feminist literary work for young adults different to one specifically for adults. The answer is that adolescents are in a moment of their lives in which they are transitioning to adulthood and therefore they are living a problematic period in terms of searching for their own identity.

The feminist movement shows young women what female adults are living: the disadvantages when accessing to power. Adult women are living the remains of a (still) patriarchal society and, as a consequence, the voice of future women is the only one expected to be heard. Taking the issue to North America, it could probably be said that adolescents are more and more often given a strong voice in literature in order to achieve a change. Adolescents need to engage with fictional young characters to find someone that understands (in a more extended way) their situation.

We find that power is one of the main recurring themes in literature of this kind. When an adolescent grows, he or she finds independence but at the same time they are still submitted to figures of higher power (teachers or parents, among others). As Roberta Trites states, adolescents are at the same time freer but still repressed by social forces in literature (7). Thus, characters are constantly gaining power and losing it. She also points out how adolescents need literature as a means to become adults: “Adults hold the highest goal: truth. The only way teenagers can obtain that goal is to grow, to quit being adolescents themselves, to become more like adults... by that formulation, young adults automatically become outsiders in their own novels” (Trites, 79).

If we, as readers, believe that reading is not a passive action we can claim that young adults’ literature is effective when contributing to identity development. It is not necessary a high dosis of reality to understand this development; a demand against injustices may create less engagement than the exploration of power and its use. Some authors fail when trying to simplificate their world’s representation for young adults to understand it. Most young readers are able to understand the complexities of this world, with issues such as sexism.

In the next pages, I will examine the phenomenon of women empowerment in two young adults dystopian novels: Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* (trilogy) and Naomi Alderman's *The Power*.

In *The Hunger Games*, the female protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, achieves a position of power in a world in which women are supposed to belong to the private sphere at home, just as her mother does. Moreover, Katniss gets to subvert gender, having typical male traits. On the other hand, *The Power* is set in a dystopian society in which women are ruling the world after some years depending on men. The novel, with the help of many intertextual references, describes the fictional oppression women are exercising over men. We encounter four different stories, which at some point gather together with the testimonies of a male character. This power is aroused by a supernatural force that gives almost every young woman the ability to provoke mortal electrical discharges.

In both novels and in the vast majority of young adults' works, female empowerment is represented by the resistance against the dominant figures and (as we said before) the construction of their personal identity. Brown and St. Clair define the empowered girls from this type of novels: "they make a place for themselves through meaningful contributions to it, nurturing others without sacrificing their own selves. They come to know themselves and they resist letting themselves be defined by others... They are courageous, enthusiastic, and determined" (49).

This helps us understand how the events the characters go through contribute to the development of their identity. However, it should be remarked that different types of empowerment can take place in literature. Stories bring with them complexities that provoke problems which lead to empowerment. Complexities can be very diverse and therefore, so are the resulted empowerment.

In order to analyse the type of empowerment we are dealing with, we should ask the novels different questions. The first one is to find out if the main character is female or male; if she is a female we should continue by defining if she is a character expected to perform "female duties", as well as if there is an oppressive figure. The last question would be to analyse if the girl has defined her own identity by the end of the novel. Despite this, it is true that fiction has limitations as well; the way in which the character's identity is developed depends on the genre we are dealing with. In this case we can say it is science-fiction, because of the futuristic elements in both books. Probably it is easier

perceived in *The Hunger Games*, because of the imaginary world of Panem and its technological advances.

Katniss and Roxy, Allie, or Margot (among other characters from *The Power*) are strong women but they are still feminine. They get to overcome the traditional belief of the weak woman but also maintain their femaleness. They serve as the voice of young girls oppressed in the real world: literature is a means in social change.

Many critics have discussed if it is actually necessary to attach gender to such an issue as empowerment: “all young adults can be said to gain a sense of empowerment so any useful definition of empowered girls must distinguish them from their male counterparts” (Brown and St. Clair, 26). That transition to adulthood we have been discussing has historically been very different from girls to boys. In addition, resistance and rebellion have been usually related to men in history. The social and traditional norm is now different, and this change has also occurred in literature. Characters come to age in very similar ways regardless of their gender.

On the other hand, gender should be applied to empowerment because it should have occurred a change in the way women come to age in order to avoid the traditional sexism. If we believe we should not talk about female empowerment as an individual issue we are accepting the capitalist and patriarchal society most women have suffered. The opportunity of empowerment in literature is offered to everyone, but women react differently in terms of resistance to oppression.

Moreover, if we consider literature an active device in social change, empowered female characters act as role models for young girls. The novels also provide them with a wide view of women’s history. The use of these characters is far more complex than the simple purpose of representing powerful women: the characters are as complex as the girls that read about them.

3.1. Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*

The first novel of Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* saga was published in 2008, and many authors of young adults’ literature declared they were obsessed with it, as mentioned in the novel, including the reknowned Stephenie Meyer, who wrote the *Twilight* saga. Probably also due to its success, Collins realised Katniss’ story was unfinished and she decided to turn the novel into a trilogy, with the second and third parts following in 2009 and 2010, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay* respectively.

Female empowerment lies mainly on the character of Katniss, who can freely choose her decisions. In the *Twilight* series we have mentioned above (some of the most well-known novels for young adults) the protagonist is female as well, Bella, but in this case Bella's decisions are shaped by the romantic narrative she shares with Edward. Along these lines, Katniss' relationship with Peeta and Gale helps to raise questions about gender roles, as we will see.

The government of Panem categorises its people depending on their sex and wealth. District 12, where the protagonist lives, is the lowest one and, therefore, the poorest. It is also the one further away from the Capitol, where President Snow lives and the power is centered. In Panem, men are the ones supposed to work and bring money to the house, while women have to stay at home, their duties being to take care of the house and to become mothers. Thus, Panem's government is totalitarian, patriarchal, and sexist. Gender roles have to change in Katniss' household when her father dies and, as a result, she has to become the "provider for the family" (Beulen 22). Katniss starts hunting and acquires abilities known as masculine: "At 11 years old [...] I took over as head of family" (*The Hunger Games*, 32). Her mum is incapable of living without a male figure, and Katniss has to become a mother for her little sister Primrose. Katniss keeps her family and friends alive, as Rachel Stark explains:

But Katniss's survival depends on her ability to form a bond not only with a girl much like Prim, but also with her strongest foil: her mother. While Katniss is analytical and focused on survival, her mother is so emotional that she's often incapacitated by it. And while Katniss might be sympathetic to those who remind her of her sister, she literally flees the scene of any emotion that comes close to the strength of her mother's grief whether it's the sickbed of a critical patient of her mother's or the entirety of District 12, shrouded as it is in desperation and sorrow. And so she's completely unprepared to partner with someone who loves her. It's only through her mother's example that she can find a way to work with Peeta and earn her escape from the games.⁸

Moreover, it is important to highlight that Katniss' journey is also marked by a romantic storyline, which is a must of young adults' literature. The main difference between Bella, from *Twilight*, and Katniss is that the latter does not become a child waiting for a man to take care of her; surprisingly, it is the other way around. Katniss

⁸ <<https://www.tor.com/2012/03/21/why-katniss-is-a-feminist-character-and-its-not-because-she-wields-a-bow-and-beats-boys-up/>> (Accessed on the 7th of June)

develops her own identity during the journey, she is able to inherit feminine and sentimentalist characteristics from her mother and the fearlessness from her father. Therefore, Katniss is the perfect combination, because she gets to combine masculinity and femininity in such a stereotyped world as Panem.

Hence, Katniss achieves power thanks to the relationships she has bonded: “Katniss is a feminist character [...] because she learns to maintain that strength while opening herself up to the power of mutual support and sisterhood.” (Stark). Katniss creates different important relationships with women which help to provide a feminist notion of female power and identity. The first one is the relationship with her sister Primrose, mentioned above. This relationship is closely related to the one Katniss builds with Rue, a young girl towards whom Katniss feels similar as towards Primrose. The friendship created helps them to form an alliance that will do as much harm as possible to the Capitol and the rest of participants in the games.

As mentioned above, it could be said that Katniss has the ability to shift from one gender to another, and this ability is what leads her to attract the population of the Capitol. The Capitol has constantly tried to reinforce Katniss’ female condition, but she never leaves behind her “male” traits.

The boy from District 1 dies before he can pull out the spear. My arrow drives deeply into the centre of his neck. He falls to his knees and halves the brief remainder of his life by yanking out the arrow and drowning in his own blood. I’m reloaded, shifting my aim from side to side, while I shout at Rue, “Are there more? Are there more?” (*The Hunger Games*, 282)

Regarding the Capitol’s reinforcement of Katniss’ femininity, we can take as evidence, for example, the character of Haymitch. Haymitch tries to convince Katniss of faking a romance with Peeta so people would sympathise with them. Haymitch’s advice shows women’s dependence on men, because Katniss would only survive the first Hunger Games thanks to her relationship with Peeta (Beulen 22). Another point to take into consideration is the fact that it seems that heterosexual relationships are the only ones accepted in Panem. However, at the beginning of the games Katniss refuses to fake a relationship with Peeta and, therefore, she symbolises a rebellion against the norm. At one point, she realises it would be beneficial for her, because pretending to agree with the social norms can give her the power she desires (Beulen 23). In addition, the figure of Peeta plays an important role in here, since not knowing that Katniss’ love is fake

(whereas his is real) gives power to Katniss, who can completely control her life and, at the same time, his as well.

Katniss uses her gender in a certain way that leads her to achieve her goals: the first one is to gain the sympathy of the audience, and the second one is to inspire the people of Panem to join her on a revolution: “The bird, the pin, the song, the berries, the watch, the cracker, the dress that burst into flames. I am the Mockingjay. The one that survived the Capitol’s plans. The symbol of the rebellion.” (*Catching Fire*, 466). Katniss does not fit what her world expects from her. Although she is involved in a heterosexual relationship, she never shows any desire to be in a relationship with a man; her only preoccupation is to survive (Beulen 23).

In addition, and according to Katha Pollitt, it is Peeta who falls in Katniss’ arms and needs her to remain stable and by his side. Katniss saves Peeta’s life many times and, regarding Gale (Katniss’ second suitor), Pollitt does not believe there is any love interest on Katniss’ part. As Pollitt puts it:

Katniss is a rare thing in pop fiction: a complex female character with courage, brains and a quest of her own. She’s Jo March as coal miner’s daughter in hunting boots, the opposite of Bella, the famously drippy, love-obsessed heroine of the *Twilight* books—and unlike clever and self-possessed Hermione of the *Harry Potter* series, she’s the lead, not a sidekick. We’re worlds away from the vicious-little-rich-girls of *Gossip Girl* and its many knockoffs, where everything revolves around looks, clothes, consumerism, social status and sexual competition.⁹

Katniss tries to get to know Peeta better, she is open-minded and, regardless the fact that their relationship was imposed upon her and she was never interested in him, she starts appreciating him, to the extent that they end up getting married in the saga’s denouement. At the end, if she agrees to fake that relationship is because she wants to keep not only herself but also Peeta alive: “During ceremonias, we are solemn and respectful but always linked together” (*Catching Fire*, 88-89).

There is an evolution from *The Hunger Games* to *Catching Fire*. It is in the second novel when Katniss evolves and is aware of the influence she makes on the society of Panem: “while she lives, the revolution lives” (*Catching Fire*, 466). The Games have destroyed Katniss’ personal life; since her participation her life is in someone else’s

⁹ <<https://www.thenation.com/article/hunger-games-feral-feminism/>> (Accessed on the 7th of June)

hands. Revolts have started all over Panem and Katniss wants to lead one in District 12. She would not be able to start a revolt if she was not aware of her power and influence, which shows Katniss' evolution. Her desire, however, is broken when President Snow announces the 75th Hunger Games: "as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors" (*Catching Fire*, 208). As we can see, Snow's oppression keeps on punishing rebels.

Katniss' female trait (also discussed by Pollitt) is her morality. When she is in the contest, she only kills someone when her own life is in danger. When Katniss makes decisions, she does not think about her own benefit exclusively, but about social justice and change. Moreover, in *Mockingjay* she feels sorry for all the people in the Nut or, for instance, when Peeta says he loves her in an interview and he kisses her, her reaction is of dislike, given that the kiss could symbolise Katniss' weakness for Panem's inhabitants. Thus, Katniss prioritises her survival but she is always worried for Panem's people.

The Hunger Games gets to subvert gender roles from the beginning of the series; as we have been discussing, Katniss is the perfect example of this. However, I will now deal with some other characters who could provide a further discussion on each gender's characteristics. President Coin is one of them; she has a male attitude, she is just as many male leaders that appear in the series. In fact, we could relate her to President Snow. Moreover, President Coin is not as compassionate as women are supposed to be; even though the death of her husband and son could have changed her, she prefers to use Katniss the same way Snow did. Another interesting character in this regard is Cinna, who uses fashion and glamour to understand Katniss' story and intentions, transforming her into "The Girl on Fire". Stereotypically, we could probably understand this character as a woman but he is indeed a man. Cinna sets his own life in danger just to get Katniss the power she deserves (and gets killed as a consequence). Furthermore, Finnick raises an interesting discussion about male sexual exploitation in *Catching Fire*. Probably the issue of male rape has not been questioned in real life, so it is very interesting and shocking the fact that he admits that exploitation. Finnick is an attractive man, who at one point reveals he was used as a sex slave in the Capitol. Unfortunately, this fact would not be so shocking in a female character.

Along the lines of the subversion of gender roles is the on-screen portrayal of Katniss and Peeta's relationship. Jennifer Lawrence has become a feminist symbol in Hollywood and all over the world due to her portrayal of Katniss Everdeen in the film

adaptation of the novels. As Ashely Fetters defends, one of the things that calls more audiences' attention is the fact that Katniss is "slightly taller than Peeta", unlike in traditional couples.

Women who are taller than their male relationship partners are empirically a rare find—and it's not entirely because women are shorter than men overall. Indeed, in much of the Western world, taller-woman couples are far less common than statistics would predict in random pairings. (Fetters)

Following the previous analysis, it becomes clear that Katniss Everdeen is the embodiment of female empowerment. The power Katniss represents is aroused and influenced by the fact that she lives in the dystopian world of Panem, in which she is forced to accomplish some gender roles, like dealing with household duties. Katniss' rebellion starts accidentally as something unconscious but turns up being her prior goal. We could define her power as political, since she fights against Snow's government. However, it is the people of Panem who place her as the Mockinjay, the face of the rebellion. Her survival instinct in the games gets to inspire the people of Panem to start the revolution. Some will say her power is internalised, but I agree with Beulen in her statement that it is externalised since she projects it to the people and she influences them (29). This position of power gets to subvert gender, relating Katniss with male characteristics, and thus leaving Peeta in an inferior and weaker position, commonly reserved for the female characters.

3.2. Naomi Alderman's *The Power*

Naomi Alderman's latest novel *The Power* was categorised by *Grazia* as "*The Handmaid's Tale* for the *Gone Girl* generation" (Alderman). In fact, Margeret Atwood defined the novel as "electrifying! Shocking! Will knock your socks off! Then you'll think twice, about everything" (Alderman).

First of all, it should be pointed out that the novel belongs to the science fiction genre. Suddenly, female adolescents all over the world start to develop an ability that allows them to provoke electric discharges at will. This fact provides women with a power men do not have. Society has completely changed; now women are more powerful than men. There are not any further explanations about the biological origin of this event, just

the “Archival documents relating to the electrostatic power, its origin, dispersal, and the possibility of cure”:

Any woman who was seven years old or younger during the Second World War may have skein buds on the points of her collarbones – although not all do; it will depend on what dose of Guardian Angel was received in early childhood, and on other genetic factors. These buds can be ‘activated’ by a controlled burst of electrostatic power by a younger woman. They are present in increasingly large proportions of women with every birth-year that passes. Women who were about thirteen or fourteen years old around the Day of the Girls almost invariably possess a full skein. Once the skein power has been activated, it cannot be taken away without tremendous danger to the woman’s life. (125)

Thus, *The Power* tells the story of different characters whose lives converge: a girl abused and raped by her adoptive parent, a girl that witnesses the murder of her mum, an American politician, and a young journalist. *The Power* answers many questions, but it provides even more to the reader: what does it mean to be a woman? And to be a man? And to be human?

One of the most shocking aspects of the novel is its intertextual references to today’s society. By inverting who is in control of the world, Alderman condemns situations young women have suffered throughout history and are still suffering nowadays. The novel deals with sexual slavery, as seen for example when Tunde (the only male protagonist) meets a Moldavian girl who says they just want “their stories told” (93), because these stories have usually been told by men, and the female point of view is necessary. Later, when Tunde is kidnapped, he appears in the middle of some kind of tribe which commercialises with people: Roxy gets Tunde in exchange to some Glitter. Besides, women question themselves how many men are needed in this world if they just need them to procreate, since the same man can get different women pregnant. In Delhi many revolts are taking place, destroying the city and putting men in danger in the name of Khali, the same way terrorist attacks are made in the name of religion: “Kahli who destroys to bring fresh growth” (132).

Regarding the topic of religion, it is important to mention Allie, who escapes from her abusive family and ends up in a nuns’ convent where she changes her name to Eve. Allie’s importance in the novel is the same as that of Jesus in Christian Religion. Allie starts sharing the word of God, who in this case is a “She”. People begin to know Allie as Mother Eve, and she rejects her past and even gets her story deleted. Instead of using

the Bible, they study the Book of Ruth. Allie's power lies on the influence she makes on every woman; she starts with the girls in the convent but with Roxy's help she spreads her power worldwide and ends up influencing Tatiana's decisions in Bessapara (Bulgaria). However, Allie's power could be questioned because she obeys her voice's orders. This power is not external because it is inside her, it is the representation of God. One of the most significant passages is when Mother Eve asks the girls to look on the female figures of their religions and follow their steps, breaking with tradition which always places men in the highest positions in religion:

'God loves all of us,' she says, 'and She wants us to know that She has changed Her garment merely. She is beyond female and male, She is beyond human understanding. But She calls your attention to that which you have forgotten. Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims: look to Fatimah, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation. 'You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure and could never harbour the divine. You have been taught to despise everything you are and to long only to be a man. But you have been taught lies. God lies within you, God has returned to earth to teach you, in the form of this new power. Do not come to me looking for answers within yourself'. (114-115)

Alderman speaks through *The Power* about countries in which women cannot drive, for instance. Nina steals Tunde's reports and publishes them under her name, the same way the names of many women were deleted in history and replaced by male ones. Political power also resides in women, with Margot in the United States and Tatiana Moskalev in Bessapara. Margot promotes the NorthStar camp, a space for girls like her daughter Jocelyn who want to learn how to control their power. In this sense, the camp works like a real military camp but just for girls.

Thus, Alderman deals with transgressive and fragile issues such as female circumcision and violence. Men cannot be alone on the streets without being afraid. Fear is described during the novel for example when Tunde is about to cross the border, confessing that "it has been a long time since he's felt comfort in a night walk" (300). Later on, he starts thinking of the horrible events that could happen to him while he waits for a car, and if there really is a car. Other examples include a hanged man with the word "slut" written on him or the rapes and sacrifices of men in the forest:

The woman sitting on the man's chest applies her palm to his genitals. [...] His cock comes up like a salute, like they always do. Like a traitor. Like a fool. [...] She holds his balls, tugs on them once, twice, just as if she were giving him a treat, and then jolts him fiercely, right through the scrotum. [...] He screams, arches his back. And then she unbuttons the crotch of her combat trousers and sits on his cock. [...] One of her mates has a cellphone. They photograph her there, straddling him. He throws his arm over his face but they pull the arm back. No, no. They want to remember this. (281)

Through examples like these, Alderman inverts gender roles, since the same events usually happen to women in the real world. Probabaly Naomi Alderman's condition of being a Jewish places her on the historic position of feeling "inferior", and she even describes the events in the forest of Bessapara as if it were a Nazi camp. Alderman defended on the *New York Times* that these violent acts women perform in her novel are not acts of revenge, even though most of the main characters were raped or abused by men:

But I do think revenge is a perfectly reasonable feeling for some characters. Just look at the news; think of the Turpins, charged with abusing their children and holding them captive. My God — that teenage girl who managed to find a phone in that situation and call for help, she is my hero. There are women today being trafficked as sex slaves. If I could give them the power to execute their captors at will, I probably would. (La Feria, *New York Times*)

It is for this reason that the character of Tunde is really important. He is the only male character; however, his attitude is not traditionally "masculine". He is concerned about what and how women feel. He neither places himself against women nor in favour of their actions. He just tries to understand everyone, maybe as a consequence of the fear he feels, or maybe because of the moral of a good journalist. Tunde exemplifies the male point of view, he gets to be close to powerful women such as Roxy and to be safe next to her (they even intimate). But, on the other hand, Tunde also suffers aggresions, as in Delhi when he is reporting what is happening there and a woman attacks him. Regarding Tunde, Alderman explains that

His story is the story about how a man in a world run by women learns how women have felt in a world run by men, living among wandering sadists, people who turn violent just

because they can. Tunde is a writer, like me. He is also the nicest character in the book. (La Feria, *New York Times*)

The rest of male characters are weak, as for example Roxy's family. Darrel is a coward because he is afraid of both his father and his sister. His attitude, it could be said, is stereotypical of female characters. He does anything it takes to save his life. Daniel is another weak male character; mainly because he loses the elections in favour to Margot, and he also questions Margot's decisions about her daughters.

On the other hand, the character of Tatiana Moskalev is at first powerful, but once she reaches power she becomes weaker and she even ends up being killed by Allie through her powers. Alderman confesses to the *New York Times* that she created Tatiana as "the female equal to Putin"; she wanted to portray the typical male "dictator who really enjoys showing off his sexuality" in the body of a woman (La Feria, *New York Times*). Tatiana begins losing her power when she starts to show it off, as for example when she makes a waiter eat some glasses from the floor: "'This bottle is worth more than you,' she says. 'A glass of this is worth more than you' [...] 'Lick it up,' she says" (229).

Language has also changed, and expressions about men are used to describe negative situations. For example, in the aforementioned example of the waiter, Tatiana points out: "'Just like a man'" (229). Moreover, it is said about Roxy: "And there she is. Hiding. Like a man." (284).

In conclusion, Alderman subverts gender roles in an extreme way, which seems ridiculous without the help of physical power over men (the skein). Could this novel represent female empowerment without the presence of a "supernatural force"? However, it is a fact that every event Alderman describes has been performed, at some time in history, by men. As Ron Charles claims, "Alderman has written our era's 'Handmaid's Tale,' and, like Margaret Atwood's classic, 'The Power' is one of those essential feminist works that terrifies and illuminates, enrages and encourages."

4. Conclusion

Right now, the real world seems to be out of ideas about how to organise its future – and that’s exactly why women’s fantasy futures feel more necessary than ever. Imagining alternative worlds is a political act, whether you want it to be or not, and for some reason, women and people of colour seem to have a particular facility for building fictional worlds that feel both fresh and feasible. (Laurie Penny)

Some of the different ideas that emerged in this dissertation regarding the portrayal of female characters in dystopian fiction are similar to the ones established in the introduction. The analysis has helped me to understand the image of women in North America and Europe and the significance of these novels.

One of the themes that emerges in this analysis is that in history there are few examples of female characters acquiring typically male roles but, in contemporary literature and especially young adults’ literature, there are some and they are very successful.

Thanks to this analysis I have been able to understand that one of the reasons why women depend on men is just in order to survive. Offred is a good example of female survival depending on men, and also Katniss, who at some point achieves power although before that she had agreed to be part of a fake heterosexual relationship to survive. It is just with Alderman’s *The Power* when this situation seems to change and it is taken to the total opposite.

While female characters in *The Handmaid’s Tale* are mainly portrayed in motherly or wifely roles, in *The Hunger Games* and *The Power* female characters are problem solvers. Maybe the roles of mothers and wives are avoided because they are novels targeted to a young audience, but I believe it is the representation of the improvement of women’s status.

The three novels are feminist dystopias which portray female empowerment. It is important to highlight the fact that they are dystopias, because this genre has moved the novels to extreme situations which clearly show how female characters achieve power in order to survive in suppressive worlds.

Regardless of both Gilead and Panem being futuristic societies and governments, the way women are treated is like returning to the past, when women were supposed to perform some stereotypical female roles by remaining in the private sphere taking care of the households and having children. Both Offred and Katniss go against these “female”

ideas. Dystopias are created to criticise real societies, therefore with these characters issues from the real world are criticised, essentially the role of women, which sometimes is still oppressed, religion, political systems, etc. On the other hand, Alderman's *The Power* uses our real world but alters it by including "superpowers" in every woman.

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has influenced many feminist dystopias. *The Hunger Games* shares what we have recently commented: a futuristic world in which initially women are oppressed but a female "heroine" fights against this situation. Moreover, Naomi Alderman herself has recognized the influence the Canadian writer has in her work. *The Power* shares with *The Handmaid's Tale* the most shocking elements, as the role of religion when oppressing women, and the different "rituals" that appear. In Atwood's novel the Ceremony is an important moment, while in *The Power* different rapes to men are described.

Based on this research I believe there is a need for further studies on these issues. Studies like this one, with regard to the portrayal of women, suggest a study of the illustration of realistic situations, as well as the influence the novels have on young girls' self-development. Another recommendation would be to study beyond borders, and to take into consideration Native American or African novels, for example, or the role of women in science fiction in general.

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